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SUBJECT: URUZGAN GOVERNOR PROMISES TO TAKE ON THRIVING POPPY
INDUSTRY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Uruzgan Governor Hamdam has vowed to reduce poppy cultivation in his province by 25 percent this season. Hamdam told the Deputy Minister of Counter Narcotics he planned to create a comprehensive CN strategy with goals in public awareness, alternative livelihood and eradication. Hamdam said local strongman (and former governor) Jan Mohammad Khan and the Provincial Chief of Police would oppose his CN plan and requested more support from the Dutch and United States, particularly for alternative livelihoods and eradication. Given the fact that Hamdam is on notice from the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to become more energetic or face being replaced, it is an open question whether he will be up to the task of matching his encouraging words with actions.

MCN Visit Prompts Change in Thinking

¶2. (SBU) The September 24 visit of Deputy Minister for Counter Narcotics (MCN) Zafar, his team, and the Embassy's NAS Director was clearly the catalyst for Governor Hamdam's new focus on tackling poppy cultivation in his province. According to the 2008 UN Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC) report, 9,929 hectares of poppy were cultivated in Uruzgan, the fourth largest cultivation in Afghanistan, following that of Helmand, Kandahar, and Farah. Poppy cultivation in the province increased 7 percent over the previous year. Insecurity in Uruzgan made governor-led eradication extremely difficult.

¶3. (SBU) During the shura organized by Hamdam, Zafar underscored the innumerable adverse effects of the drug trade, the commitment of MCN and other ministries in Kabul to provide better support for the provinces and the economic benefits of eradication through the Governor-Led Eradication Program and Good Performance Initiative. Zafar addressed the complaints expressed by Hamdam and tribal elders that MCN did not provide enough support to the provinces, but the Deputy Minister effectively kept the spotlight focused on the critical role of the Governor and provincial leaders. Hamdam agreed to accelerate the completion of his tailored proposals for CN action in Uruzgan.

Indicators of Commitment

¶4. (SBU) Since the MCN visit, Hamdam has privately admitted to PRTOff that he has not acted aggressively on CN, but he was

determined to "gradually get tougher." In addition to the increased pressure he feels from Kabul, Hamdam has become convinced of the inseparable link between the ongoing insurgency and the drug trade in Uruzgan. Moreover, Hamdam is keen on advancing his development goals for the province by gaining access to the considerable funds available through the Good Performance Initiative (GPI). For these reasons, he has taken the following steps to reduce poppy production:

-- Development of a CN Plan. Hamdam tasked his IDLG-supplied advisor for security to coordinate the creation of a comprehensive CN strategy for the next four years. The Governor aims to reduce poppy cultivation in Uruzgan by 25 percent in 2009, and eliminate it completely by 2012. In consultation with the INL-funded Counter Narcotics Advisory Team (CNAT) assigned to Uruzgan, the provincial authorities developed the first draft of a plan that focuses on steps to ratchet up public awareness, alternative livelihood programs and law enforcement and eradication. The plan still requires some fine-tuning to make it more realistic in the near term -- namely, it depends heavily on the immediate allocation of financial resources and ANSF deployments from Kabul -- but it is a step in the right direction.

-- Information Campaign. During a November 10 MCN-sponsored workshop on eradication for governors, Hamdam stressed that public awareness is the most important component of his approach to CN. He explained that the rare combination of high wheat prices, low poppy prices, possible measures taken by the Taliban to restrict the production of poppy (to limit oversupply) and renewed popular discontent with the drug trade created a unique opportunity this year to steer farmers away from poppy cultivation. Taking advantage

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of INL-provided funds and ISAF/OEF transportation and security, Hamdam and provincial officials are repeating this message in numerous shuras at the provincial and district level. On November 25, he will host a Peace Jirga involving 1,500 tribal elders and religious leaders and will seek to secure greater popular support for greater CN efforts. Hamdam hopes to avoid conflict with tribal elders and farmers during the eradication season by encouraging them to make the right choice now.

-- Alternative Livelihood. Although Hamdam is frustrated with the level of alternative livelihood assistance he has received, he is determined to make the best out of the situation. The Dutch Embassy, through the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is distributing wheat seed and fertilizer to 20,000 families throughout the province, and despite FAO insistence that the assistance is humanitarian in nature, Hamdam is spinning the assistance as an alternative livelihoods program. Hamdam has instructed his Director of Agriculture and Director of CN to solicit greater and more explicit alternative livelihood support from the Netherlands, Australia and U.S. Uruzgan failed to put to good use previous USAID alternative livelihood assistance provided earlier this year, such as the donation of 12,000 almond seedlings and 10 tractors, but USAID is currently reviewing possible alternative livelihood programs for the province.

-- Eradication. UNODC estimates that only 113 hectares were eradicated in early 2008, down from 204 hectares in 2007. Hamdam promises that this season will be different. (Hamdam claims that last season he had convinced farmers to self-eradicate, but UNODC surveyors so not verify self-eradication; thus, he believes the number of eradicated fields is greater than 113.) Recognizing that Uruzgan will not likely receive support from the Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) this season, Hamdam hopes to use the tractors donated by USAID to eradicate the largest concentrations of poppy in all five districts (these have been sitting idle at his compound). He has asked the U.S. Embassy to repair the tractors and equip them with tines for eradication. Hamdam will attempt to hire private contractors to operate the tractors and will call for ANSF support (hopefully from Kabul) to provide force protection. He has agreed to use the target eradication maps provided by the UK Embassy to conduct the eradication operations in early 2009. (Comment: Without the provision of more Afghan security forces, Hamdam is unlikely to make progress on the eradication front. End Comment.)

Obstacles to Progress

¶5. (SBU) Hamdam remains concerned that former governor and local power broker Jan Mohammad Khan (JMK) will stand in the way of a more robust Governor-led Eradication. JMK's widely speculated ties to the drug trade and his tight grip on the Provincial Chief of Police provide the former governor sufficient motive and means to resist Hamdam's efforts. At a minimum, JMK's large tracts of land in eastern Tarin Kowt are likely be overlooked during any eradication efforts.

¶6. (SBU) Hamdam must reinvigorate his Counter Narcotics Working Group (CNWG) to sustain coordinated and comprehensive action by the relevant departments. Hamdam tends to conduct coordination meetings on an ad hoc basis, but executing his CN strategy requires regular and close interaction with all of the players, including the relevant line ministry representatives, with whom he continues to have rocky relations. As for the international community, in addition to the Dutch CN Police attached to the PRT, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Australian Federal Police recently concluded agreements with the PRT to deploy agents to Uruzgan to strengthen interdiction efforts. Hamdam needs to meet the international community's increased commitment to Uruzgan's CN efforts by dedicating more attention to the CNWG. PRTOff have encouraged the Governor to initiate monthly CNWG meetings. If Governor Hamdam follows through on his promises of decisive action on counter narcotics - a definite challenge - he could go some distance in answering the IDLG's demand that he improve his overall performance or face replacement.

WOOD